

Message Text

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43

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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 3950

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, CO

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT LOPEZ SPEECH UPON OPENING OF UTC CONGRESS IN CALI

1. SUMMARY: ON APRIL 27, PRESIDENT LOPEZ SPOKE IN CALI ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING OF THE 13TH CONGRESS OF COLOMBIA'S LARGEST LABOR UNION, THE UNION OF COLOMBIAN WORKERS (UTC). THE LONG AND RAMBLING SPEECH

WHICH WAS TELEVISED CONTAINED NO NEW INITIATIVES. AS ON OTHER RECENT OCCASIONS, LOPEZ DELIVERED A CATCH-ALL TALK; WARNING OF DANGERS TO DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS, DEFENDING HIS ADMINISTRATION, BLAMING ECONOMIC

DIFFICULTIES ON CAUSES BEYOND HIS CONTROL, AND ASKING FOR COOPERATION AND UNDERSTANDING FROM THE WORKING CLASS. AUDIENCE WAS UNENTHUSIASTIC AND SOMEWHAT DISAPPOINTED. END SUMMARY.

2. LOPEZ OPENED THE SPEECH BY REMINDING HIS LISTENERS THAT HE FAVORED AN INDEPENDENT LABOR MOVEMENT OVER ONE ORGANIZED OR CONTROLLED BY THE GOVERNMENT. HOWEVER, HE SAID, HE WOULD PREFER ONE SINGLE CENTRALIZED MOVEMENT, AND WITH THAT PREFERENCE IN MIND, HE VIEWS ALL UNIONS EQUALLY

WITHOUT REGARD TO THEIR ORIGINS. THE STATEMENT WAS IN CLEAR REFERENCE TO HIS ADMINISTRATION'S EARLIER RECOGNITION OF THE COMMUNIST CSTC AND APPEARED OUT OF PLACE IN A SPEECH TO THE UTC, REGARDED AS ANTI-COMMUNIST.

3. IN A LENGTHY DISCUSSION OF THE DIFFICULTIES FACING THE GOVERNMENT, CONFIDENTIAL

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LOPEZ FIRST MADE A VEILED REFERENCE TO PRESSURES FROM VARIOUS

SECTORS TO IMPOSE A STATE OF SIEGE, BUT REJECTED SUCH PRESSURES IN FAVOR OF MAINTAINING A TOTALLY "DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM". IN REFERENCE ON WHICH HE DID NOT ELABORATE THE PRESIDENT SAID THAT THE "LOOSE TALK OF THE PAST 40 YEARS ABOUT YANKEE IMPERIALISM, COLONIALISM, MONOPOLIES, UNWARRANTED ENRICHMENT, WARS OF LIBERATION, AND THE FUTILITY OF FOLLOWING PATHS OF PEACE WAS TAKEN ON A NEW FLAVOR AS DAILY EVENTS HAVE CONFIRMED THE WARNINGS THAT ARE SPREAD BY THE FOUR WINDS".

4. CITING EXTERNAL FACTORS ADVERSELY AFFECTING COLOMBIA, BUT OUTSIDE HIS CONTROL, LOPEZ SAID THAT THE WORLD ENERGY CRISIS BROUGHT ON BY THE PETROLEUM PRODUCING COUNTRIES HAS CREATED UNFAVORABLE ECONOMIC CONDITIONS THAT HAVE RESULTED IN INFLATION, SHRINKING MARKETS AND PRICES FOR COLOMBIAN, GOODS, AND HIGHER PRICES FOR IMPORTS FROM INDUSTRIALIZED NATIONS. ADDING TO THE PROBLEM, ACCORDING TO THE PRESIDENT, IS THE NECESSITY TO IMPORT PETROLEUM, "A LEGACY CREATED BY THE POLICIES OF PAST ADMINISTRATIONS".

5. DEFENDING HIS OWN RECORD, LOPEZ ASKED THAT MIRACLES NOT BE EXPECTED, THEN WENT ON TO LIST HIS SUCCESSES SO FAR: THE RATE OF INFLATION HAS DROPPED DURING RECENT MONTHS, COLLECTION OF TAXES FROM THE RICH HAS INCREASED, SALARIES HAVE RISEN, THOUSANDS OF NEW CLASSROOM OPENINGS FOR STUDENTS HAVE BEEN CREATED, AND THE "SALA CUNA" LAW WAS PASSED, PROMISING DAY CARE CENTERS FOR ALL PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN. LOPEZ EVEN POINTED TO COLOMBIA'S SUPPORT OF PANAMA IN THE CANAL NEGOTIATIONS AS OF BENEFIT FOR COLOMBIANS.

6. IN CLSOING, LOPEZ ASKED THAT THE LABOR MOVMENT AVOID SPECTACULAR BUT UNPRODUCTIVE STRIKES AND IRRELEVANT ISSUES SUCH AS VIETNAM, THEN CALLED UPON THE WORKERS TO PARTICIPATE, ALONG WITH OTHER COLOMBIANS, IN THZSCOMING GREAT DEBATES ON NEW LEGISLATION. "UNDER THE CONSITUION", SAID THE PRESIDENT, "THE WORKER DESERVES SPECIAL PROTECTION BY THE STATE, AND THE GOVERNMENT...WILL NOT BE INDIFFERENT TO THAT OBLIGATION".

7. COMMENT: LOPEZ SPEECH IS PART OF HIS EARLIER ANNOUNCED PLAN TO TAKE TO THE "PLAZAS" TO DEFEND THE COUNTRYS INSTITUTIONS. THE PRESIDENT, UNDER SOME PRESSURE TO IMPOSE A STATE OF SIEGE, AND POSSIBLE SENSING A FLOUNDERING IN HIS OWN ADMINISTRATION, HAS APPARENTLY DECIDED TO REPEAT HIS SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN TECHNIQUE. HE IS NOW TURNING DIRECTLY TO THE POPULACE IN A VARIETY OF PUBLIC FORA TO REJECT THE ALTERNATIVE OF IMPOSING A STATE OF SIEGE, REKINDLE ENTHUSIASM FOR HIS GOVERNMENT, AND PERHAPS REMOVE ATTENTION

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FROM TROUBLES WITHIN HIS OWN LIBERAL PARTY. IN RECENT APPEARANCES BEFORE CROWDS IN BOGOTA, BARRANQUILLA, AND NOW CALI, THE SPEECHES HAVE BEEN THE SAME CATCH-ALLS, WITH EMPHASIS ON THREE THEMES: EXTERNAL CAUSES FOR ECONOMIC PROBLEMS, THE PRESERVATION OF DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF HIS ADMINISTRATION.

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